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Problems and Prospects of Seasonal Workers. A study of Sugar Industry in Jhang District

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Sugar industry is one of the largest agro-based industry in Pakistan, playing a crucial role in the country's economy. It is a labor-intensive sector, closely tied to employment generation. The process, from sugarcane sowing to harvesting and processing during the crushing season, involves significant labor input. While labor is predominantly required during the initial stages of sowing and after that stage harvesting and processing phase is capital intensive. This industry provides excellent employment opportunities during crushing seasons. This study specifically focuses on the socio-economic conditions and challenges faced by seasonal workers in the sugar industry, particularly in Jhang district. Typically, sugar production occurs over a span of 3 to 4 months annually, corresponding to the duration of employment for seasonal workers in the industry. Accommodation, health, transportation, and job security issues are adversely affecting the performance and livelihood of permanent workers. These workers encounter various difficulties, including gender discrimination, wage disparities, and lack of vacation benefits etc. Therefore, the study addresses the issues faced by seasonal workers only, and does not analyze the conditions of permanent workers within the sugar industry in Jhang District.

Keywords: Sugar industry, Jhang, seasonal workers, job insecurity, rural employment.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's agricultural sector is greatly influenced by the extensive cultivation of sugarcane, which serves as the primary cash crop and holds a dominant position in the country's economy that takes up a third of Pakistan's farming land. Punjab province, known for its vast and fertile land, leads in sugarcane cultivation, boasting higher yields compared to other regions. The crop occupies an area of 1.22 million hectares and produces a total of 73.40 million tons. While sugarcane has traditionally been cultivated for sugar, it holds promise for playing a substantial role in the country's energy supply (Khan et al., 2019). The eastern central region of Punjab emerges as the primary sugarcane-producing area, responsible for around 60% of the country's sugarcane cultivation, primarily intended for sugar manufacturing. It is forecasted that in 2024, the production of sugar cane will be 7.05 million tons, which is three percent higher than that of 2023 (Farooq, 2023). Growing sugar cane is an important aspect of Pakistan's agriculture. The industry supports the farmers by providing a stable market for their crops, encouraging cultivation and contributing to rural income. Sugar serves as a primary source of carbohydrates for direct consumption, but it also plays a crucial role in various essential food ingredients and their manufacturing processes (Khan, 2002).

The sugar industry plays a vital role in Pakistan's economy. At the time of independence in 1947, the country had only two sugar mills one in Rahwali, Gujranwala, and the other in Takht Bhai. Today, Pakistan operates 76 out of its 78 sugar mills, with a combined daily crushing capacity of around 300,000 tons of sugarcane. The industry provides employment to over 10 million people, including about one million farmers who are directly or indirectly involved in sugarcane cultivation and processing. Annually, the sector contributes approximately 8.53 billion rupees in excise duty and sales tax (Farooq 2023). The sugar industry contributes significantly to the national economy through tax revenue, both directly and indirectly. It generates income through exports and stimulates economic activity in related sectors**.** But things are changing, and companies are trying to grow by either buying smaller mills or building new ones (Murray & Walbeek, 2007). The Sugarcane industry consists of both sectors organized and unorganized sector organized sector of

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sugar industry consist of sugar mills and factories which are under the rules and regulations of the Government. Government creates laws to help these industries and make sure workers have a good environment but there is no proper rules and regulations for the seasonal workers. Organized sector produces sugar and other products related to sugar commodities. And the other one is unorganized sector which produces khandsri and Gurr which is totally small scale sector especially in villages or local areas there is no Government rules and regulations that need to be followed. This industry is a labor-intensive industry and employing large percentage of the population (Salunke, 2015).

Although the International Labour Organization (ILO) establishes standards through its conventions, its effectiveness is constrained by its lack of enforcement authority and further points out that policymakers in developing countries often perceive occupational health as a non-essential luxury. This perspective overlooks the critical connection between a healthier workforce and increased productivity, which can significantly contribute to breaking the poverty cycle by enhancing output, wages, living conditions, and overall economic development (Randhawa & Gupta, 2017). The efficiency of employees is greatly influenced by their work environment, including physical, mental, and social factors. Industrial psychology analyzes these elements to recommend ways to improve workplace conditions. A well designed environment reduces stress, fatigue, and boredom, boosting overall performance. Creating a comfortable and supportive setting helps employees work with greater ease. Such conditions also contribute to minimizing dissatisfaction and workplace grievances. Common employee complaints involve wages, benefits, working hours, promotions, and job responsibilities (Indumathi et al., 2023).

It is employing multi-skilled workers at various levels of management. From a managerial perspective, it is crucial to utilize employees' skills optimally. Sugar factories operate in two distinct seasons: the "Crushing Season" and the "Off-season." The Crushing Season refers to the period each year when sugar cane is crushed and sugar is manufactured, while the Off-season refers to the period each year other than the Crushing Season (Koroglu, 2023).

A seasonal worker is someone employed solely in specific manufacturing activities, such as cotton ginning, coffee production, rubber manufacturing, tea processing, sugar production, or any other manufacturing process. If an individual works for 4 to 5 months within a year in any industry, they are considered seasonal (Purss & Ainsworth, 2009). A seasonal worker is someone employed by an employer for no more than 4 months (or 120 days) during the previous calendar year. While the seasonal employment gave many benefits to an industry or organization it has an adverse impact towards unemployment. And all types of unemployment decreases due to seasonal employment (Vucetic, 2012). Retaining seasonal workers are really important for a industry because the industry like sugar industry cannot hire workers for the full time and Industries have a limited time frame to train these workers as they have already obtained employment within the industry so the seasonal workers play a vital role in the development and management of the industry and hiring of seasonal workers for every year it is very costly so organizations use this cost for the gain of loyalty of seasonal workers and try to give this amount in the form of salary. So the most of the seasonal workers accept that job every coming year so these are the important part of employment in industry and play an important role in industry (Sosic et al., 2018).

The lack of control amplifies the impact of work-related stressors, underlining the importance of empowering workers with mechanisms to manage and mitigate workplace risks effectively (Natarajan & Kiruthika, 2013). Recognizing the human element at every stage is crucial. Employees possess valuable knowledge and experience that, when effectively utilized, significantly contribute to organizational prosperity. This can only be achieved when employees feel valued and actively participate in the production process, striving to maximize productivity (Lalitha & Priyanka, 2014).

Seasonal workers in the sugar industry face many challenges due to the temporary nature of their jobs. The unpredictability of income makes financial planning difficult, especially during off-season periods, amplifying job insecurity. Many lack access to basic benefits like healthcare and retirement plans. Earning low wages makes it hard to manage finances, and not having many chances for education and training which stop them from getting better jobs. So, these workers often find it tough to find steady jobs in other industries because they don't have many skills or much experience (Kendre, 2011).

The study focuses on investigating the socio-economic circumstances of seasonal laborers, particularly those involved in sugarcane-cutting and transport activities across in sugar factories in Jhang District. It highlights the intertwined relationship between seasonal workers and the capitalist development of rural agricultural production in the region. By examining the living and working conditions of these seasonal workers, the research seeks to uncover the factors influencing their decisions to work.

Objectives

- To identify the specific challenges faced by seasonal workers in the sugar industry in Jhang region.
- To assess the impact of seasonal employment on worker's financial stability, overall well-being, and satisfaction.
- To provide evidence-based insights for policymakers to formulate effective policies addressing the issues faced by seasonal workers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this research the primary data was collected through a well-designed and comprehensive questionnaire from a sample of seasonal workers employed in four sugar mills. A total of 200 respondents participated 50 from each mill. Some workers resided near the mills, while others came from outside the city. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, phone calls and face-to-face meetings (Knight, 2019).

To achieve the research objectives, a mixed-methods approach was employed. Structured interviews with 200 workers, provided in-depth insights into their personal experiences and perceptions regarding their working conditions. In addition, focus group discussions were organized to facilitate collective dialogue among workers, helping to identify common difficulties and shared concerns. Quantitative data was also collected on demographics, wages, job satisfaction, and other relevant factors (Prasara & Gheewala, 2018).

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the qualitative data from interviews and focus groups, identifying key themes and patterns in the workers' narratives. The quantitative data from surveys was analyzed using statistical techniques to explore relationship between reported difficulties and demographic characteristics. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the research, ensuring participant confidentiality and obtaining informed consent from all respondents. By addressing the challenges faced by seasonal workers in Jhang, this study aims to provide actionable insights for policy makers and stake holders to improve labor conditions in the sugar industry. Current Punjab labor policies and labor inspections teams are not effectively enforcing labor laws to protect the rights and benefits of seasonal workers (Mapes, 2010).

***Analysis of the data collected*:** For the purpose of analyzing, the data was further processed by using statistical tools, namely percentage analysis, chi-square analysis, ranking tables, and a scaling technique was used to find out the satisfaction level of the respondents. The respondents were asked to rank their order of various factors determining job satisfaction in the Jhang Districts Sugar Mills. The scaling technique was used to find out the satisfaction level of the respondents. The information collected through the questionnaires was the subject matter of analysis in this chapter. The questionnaire was constructed in such a way as to obtain information regarding the respondents' livelihood pattern among Sugar Mills employees. The collected data was analyzed and presented in this chapter. The findings of the analysis were summarized as follows. Binary logistic regression analysis was run on the data to find out the signification of factors. There were two hundred respondents, and data was collected through face-to-face interviews and telephone calls, etc., and different respondents were chosen by a random sampling technique. The data was given below in the form of tables so the respondents' answers to the questionnaires could be identified. The number of sample units selected from the population was called the sample size; 200 respondents were obtained from the population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here are some important variables explained which highly affect the level of satisfaction of seasonal workers in these sugar industries.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of respondents according to their experience about receiving Bonuses.

Bonuses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Provided	156	78.0	78.0	78.0
Provided	44	22.0	22.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

The bonus distribution data for seasonal workers in the Jhang district's sugar industry shows that a significant majority, 78%, do not receive bonuses. In contrast, only 22% reported receiving bonuses. This disparity suggests that majority of seasonal workers may feel undervalued, which could affect morale and productivity. The limited availability of bonuses might also impact the attraction and retention of labor during peak seasons. It is also concluded that bonuses should be provided to workers to meet their expenditure of traveling (Buvaneshwari & Suresh, 2017). Addressing this issue by considering a more equitable bonus system could enhance worker satisfaction and encourage greater commitment among seasonal employees in the sugar industry.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of respondents according to experience of Accommodation.

Accommodation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Given	154	77.0	77.0	77.0
Given	46	23.0	23.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

The table indicates that 77% of seasonal workers in the sugar industry of Jhang District do not receive accommodation, while only 23% are provided with housing. This significant lack of accommodation can lead to additional challenges for workers, particularly those who may travel from distant areas for employment. Without proper housing, workers may face difficulties related to commuting, safety, and overall well-being. Improving access to accommodation would not only enhance the quality of life for these workers but could also lead to increased productivity and retention rates within the industry, highlighting the importance of supportive labor practices.

Table 3. Percentage distribution of respondents according to experience about Health Issues.

Health Issues	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	100	50.0	50.0	50.0
Yes	100	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

In the Jhang District's sugar industry, health issues among seasonal workers are a significant concern, with 50% reporting health problems. This prevalence of health concerns may be attributed to various factors, including long working hours, inadequate facilities, and the physically demanding nature of the job. The equal split in responses indicates that while some workers do not experience health issues, a substantial portion faces challenges that could affect their productivity and well-being. Addressing these health-related concerns is vital for improving working conditions and ensuring that seasonal workers can perform their tasks safely and efficiently, thereby fostering a healthier workforce in the sugar industry.

Table 4. Percentage distribution of respondents according to experience about Promotion Chances.

Promotion Chances	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Available	156	78.0	78.0	78.0
Available	44	22.0	22.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

The data on promotion chances for seasonal workers in the sugar industry in Jhang District indicates limited opportunities for advancement. Out of 200 respondents, a substantial 78% reported that promotion opportunities are not available, suggesting a stagnant career trajectory for most workers. In contrast, only 22% indicated that promotions are accessible, reflecting a small segment of the workforce that may experience career growth. This lack of upward mobility can contribute to job dissatisfaction and high turnover rates, emphasizing the need for improved career development pathways within the industry. Overall, the findings highlight challenges in workforce retention and motivation among seasonal workers.

Table 5. Percentage distribution of respondents according to experience about Wage Delay.

Wage Delay	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not delay	71	35.5	35.5	35.5
Delay	129	64.5	64.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

In the Jhang District's sugar industry, wage delays significantly impact seasonal workers, with 64.5% experiencing delays in payment. In contrast, only 35.5% report receiving their wages on time. This high incidence of wage delays can create financial instability for workers, particularly during critical periods when they rely on timely income to support their families. Such delays may be attributed to the industry's seasonal nature and fluctuating cash flow, underscoring the need for improved financial management practices within sugar mills. Addressing these wage issues is essential for ensuring fair compensation and fostering a more sustainable workforce in the sector. It is also concluded earlier in the research of finding job satisfaction and workers socioeconomic life (Dubey, 2013).

Table 6. Percentage distribution of respondents according to experience about Working Hours.

Working Hours	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
More than 8 hrs	67	33.5	33.5	33.5
8 hrs	133	66.5	66.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

In the Jhang District's sugar industry, majority of seasonal workers, approximately 66.5%, report working standard 8-hour shifts, while 33.5% work more than 8 hours. This distribution highlights a significant reliance on extended working hours, which may reflect the industry's seasonal demands, especially during peak harvest times. The high percentage of workers engaged in longer hours suggests potential challenges regarding labor conditions and worker fatigue, particularly as they strive to meet production targets. Understanding these working patterns is crucial for developing policies that ensure fair labor practices and enhance worker well-being in the sugar sector.

Table 7. The Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Health issues	-2.722	.907	9.004	1	.003	.066
Accommodation	1.401	.791	3.134	1	.077	4.060
Wage delay	-2.273	.770	8.719	1	.003	.103
Sudden termination	-1.032	.770	1.795	1	.180	.356
Working Hours	-3.189	.896	12.661	1	.000	.041
Permanent	3.372	.893	14.271	1	.000	29.138
Promotion	2.510	.836	9.020	1	.003	12.301
Bonuses	2.571	.862	8.899	1	.003	13.083
Seniors behavior	1.006	.787	1.633	1	.201	2.735
Transportation	2.856	.872	10.737	1	.001	17.393
Marital Status	-1.952	.709	7.578	1	.006	.142

1. The coefficient for Bonuses (B = 2.571, Sig. = 0.003) indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between receiving bonuses and job retention among seasonal workers. Bonuses serve as strong incentives by rewarding employees financially for their performance, which enhances their job satisfaction and motivation to remain with the employer. This correlation underscores the value of recognition and reward in reinforcing

positive behaviors and fostering a sense of appreciation among workers. By linking bonuses to performance metrics, organizations not only incentivize higher productivity but also cultivate loyalty and commitment, reducing turnover and maintaining a motivated workforce in seasonal contexts like the sugar industry in Jhang District.

2. The coefficient for Accommodation (B = 1.401, Sig. = 0.077) indicates a positive trend towards improving job retention, although it is marginally significant (p = 0.077). Adequate accommodation for workers can enhance job satisfaction by alleviating stress associated with housing and improving overall living conditions. This suggests that providing better housing options could play a crucial role in attracting and retaining seasonal labor in industries like the sugar sector in Jhang District. While the statistical significance is borderline, addressing accommodation needs remains important for fostering a supportive work environment and enhancing employee retention strategies.
3. Health Issues: The significant negative coefficient for health issues among seasonal workers (-2.722, Sig. = 0.003) indicates that poor health reduces their likelihood of staying employed. This is due to limitations in physical capabilities, increased absenteeism, reduced job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates. Addressing health concerns through workplace wellness programs and healthcare access can improve retention by promoting worker health, enhancing productivity, reducing costs associated with turnover, and fulfilling legal and ethical responsibilities towards employee well-being. Beta value negative indicates that it has a negative relationship towards job satisfaction.
4. Promotion (B = 2.510, Sig. = 0.003): The significant positive coefficient for Promotion indicates that offering opportunities for career advancement strongly influences job retention. Employees value the chance to progress within the organization, which motivates them to stay and contribute. Clear paths for promotion foster job satisfaction by recognizing employees' skills and potential, thereby enhancing their commitment and loyalty. These opportunities not only encourage professional growth and skill development but also contribute to organizational stability by retaining experienced personnel. Overall, promoting from within reinforces a positive work environment and reduces turnover by aligning employee goals with long-term career prospects within the company.
5. The coefficient for Wage Delay (B = -2.273, Sig. = 0.003) indicates a statistically significant negative impact on job retention among seasonal workers. Similar to health issues, wage delays contribute to financial instability, which undermines workers' ability to remain in their positions. Timely payment of wages is essential to sustain morale and commitment within the workforce, ensuring that workers can meet their financial obligations and maintain job satisfaction. Addressing wage delays through effective payroll management practices is crucial in industries such as the sugar sector in Jhang District, where seasonal workers depend on consistent and reliable income.
6. The negative coefficient for Working Hours (B = -3.189, Sig. = 0.000) indicates that longer working hours significantly decrease retention among seasonal workers. Excessive work hours contribute to burnout and dissatisfaction, impacting job satisfaction and motivation to remain with the employer. Implementing policies to regulate and limit working hours can mitigate these effects, promoting work-life balance and improving retention rates in industries such as the sugar sector in Jhang District.

The logistic regression analysis reveals several significant predictors of the outcome. Health issues, wage delays, and long working hours are associated with a decreased likelihood of the outcome, while permanent employment, promotions, bonuses, and better transportation options significantly increase the likelihood. Notably, permanent positions and bonuses have the strongest effects. Accommodation and seniors' behavior trends suggest some influence but are not statistically significant, and sudden termination shows no significant impact. Marital status also decreases the likelihood of the outcome. Overall, the analysis highlights that job security, financial incentives, and transportation significantly impact the outcome, while certain negative job conditions and personal factors also play a role. The same results and discussions are also concluded where job satisfaction was measured (Dubey, 2013).

***Conclusion*:** This research examines the socio-economic and labor challenges faced by seasonal workers in Jhang District's sugar mills. These workers endure harsh conditions, including long hours, night shifts, and exposure to heat, chemicals, and pollution, which severely impact their health and well-being. A lack of personal protective equipment and limited access to healthcare worsen these issues. Low wages, wage delays, and lack of off-season salaries create financial instability. Supervisor mistreatment and the absence of promotion opportunities further reduce job satisfaction. A mixed-methods study of 200 workers reveals most are young, less formally educated males relying on this work to support families. Key findings highlight the need to improve wages, job security, and workplace safety. Income motivation strongly influences job satisfaction. Recommendations include fair wage practices, healthcare access, and improved management behavior. These reforms would enhance worker well-being and support industry sustainability.

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***Ethical statement*:** This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards. Participants were voluntary, and respondents' identities were kept confidential.

***Availability of data*:** The data used in this study was collected through primary sources using structured questionnaire by the first author. The data is not publicly available due to confidentiality and privacy concerns.

***Consent to participate*:** Written and verbal consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study.

***Informed consent*:** Written informed consent was obtained from all participants regarding publishing their data and photographs

***Consent for publication*:** All author/co-authors are willing or the publication of the article.

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***Policy referred*:** Pakistan Labour Policy (Latest: 2010), Minimum Wages Ordinance, 1961 (Pakistan), Punjab Labour Policy (2018).

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